



GAMES NEWS

NOW HERE'S A CRAZY IDEA

Run for the hills!

The stupid, annoying, anatomically correct (for a 10-year-old boy) Crazy Frog is coming to a PC screen near you. Wallaroo Licensing, the company that represents the frog, has offered the character for



worldwide licensing, having decided it would be perfect for a computer game. With any luck, the short-lived popularity of characters such as this will mean that by the time the game's out, nobody will care enough to buy it. We hope to bring you news in the future of the horrific, slow, violent and bloody death of Crazy Frog.

GTA FOR PC

Finally, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is available for the PC. The excellent PlayStation 2 game is set in the early 1990s and has one of the best game soundtracks ever, including Rage Against the Machine, Stone Temple Pilots and Guns 'n' Roses.

It is also one of the most playable games ever, with three cities to explore and a never-dull range of missions to accomplish. We didn't manage to get a copy before our print deadline, but we will include a full review next month. In the meantime, the game is available for around £25.

REVIEW STRATEGY GAME

ATARI Boiling Point

RATING ★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.atari.com

Boiling Point takes the open structure of Grand Theft Auto (GTA) and applies it to the story of Saul Myers, a Travis Bickle lookalike searching for his missing daughter, Lisa. The box promotes a gritty storyline, but the game goes for a tongue-in-cheek approach to conversations. This kills the atmosphere, reducing the characters to silly caricatures. A more realistic and darker approach would have done this game a lot of favours.

A great feature of this game is the map, which covers over 450km of Bolivian jungle. This massive swathe of game world is dotted with quiet towns, military bases, ancient temples, native villages and plush villas. It is populated by many factions such as the government, guerrillas, mafia and natives. The map is cunningly designed so you can drive from one side of it to the other without any pauses while the game loads.

Sadly, the gameplay is too reliant on earning money. In GTA if you lose a car, you stand in the road and jack the next one to come along. In Boiling Point you can't steal cars; you have to buy them from a dealer. Crashing your car into a river can seriously set you back in your task.

While you can take on any job from any of the game's factions, all of which pay in cash, it can mean that you spend a lot of time saving up enough money just to buy guns and a car. It doesn't help that vehicles have to be repaired and even filled with petrol. Owning a car becomes a massive chore, and this level of realism doesn't rest easily in a computer game.



It's a jungle out there, and you may feel compelled to shoot at everything in sight, but that would be daft

Despite the large map size, Boiling Point doesn't offer the level of freedom we'd expect. Large parts of it are desolate areas that contain nothing with which to interact. Visit the populated parts of town, and you can't get the results you want. For example, killing the car dealer doesn't get you a set of car keys when you search his body.

Should you manage to kill someone worth searching, there's the tedious process of copying their items to your inventory using the mouse. It all feels as though the developers had a grand scheme for a large, realistic gaming world, but didn't have the time to implement it properly.

For the most part, it's a chore to play through the game. We're sure it will find its fans, but for most people there's just too much work and effort involved to get anywhere with Boiling Point.

Seth Barton

✓ Massive game world with no loading times

✗ Can feel like a chore; lacks atmosphere

REQUIREMENTS Windows XP or 2000, 2GHz Pentium III or AMD equivalent processor, 512MB RAM, DirectX 9.0 128MB Hardware T&L graphics card, 4GB disk space, 6X DVD-ROM drive.
Product code B0006SK5TW

HOTLIST FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

Half-Life 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

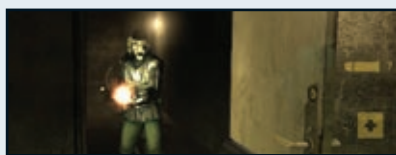
SUPPLIER www.cdwow.com

DETAILS www.half-life2.com



Half-Life 2 was a year overdue, but it was well worth the wait. It is one of the most involving first-person shooters we've ever played and it will quickly drag you into the plot. It is designed with lush graphics that run well, even on older systems, making it a game that everyone can enjoy. Only an annoying online registration process mars the game.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 1.2GHz processor, 256MB RAM (2GHz, 512MB recommended), 4.5GB disk space.
Product code B00009ATWC



HOTLIST SIM AND BATTLE GAME

Stronghold 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.stronghold2.com



The sequel to 2001's sleeper hit, Stronghold 2 takes all the castle-building fun of the first game and makes it even better. This time around you can choose to play the sim game, where you must keep your citizens happy, or the war game, where you battle against the computer for control of the map. There's loads of gameplay in this innovative game, which should keep you busy for hours at a time.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Pentium 4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB graphics card, 2.5GB disk space.
Product code B0007GIXOW



HOTLIST ONLINE ADVENTURE GAME

City of Heroes

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18, then £9 monthly

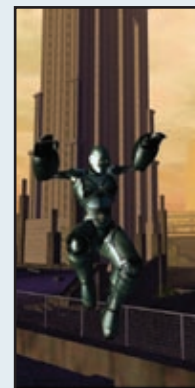
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk

DETAILS <http://uk.cityofheroes.com>



If you've always longed to clamber into a spandex suit and fight crime, City of Heroes is the game for you. This internet adventure puts you in a city full of other human-controlled heroes. There are plenty of missions and monthly updates. This game is lots of fun, although gameplay may be too simplistic for some.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98, 800MHz Pentium III, 256MB RAM, 2GB disk space, net access. **Product code** B0006IS3NW





REVIEW DRIVING GAME

ATARI
Driv3r

RATING ★

PRICE £10 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS www.driv3r.com

Driv3r is the second sequel to the popular Driver. It wants to be a taut, edgy thriller, with a cool soundtrack that will appeal to the Grand Theft Auto (GTA) generation. While the rendered cut scenes go some way towards achieving this goal, the utterly appalling playability ruins the game.

For starters, there's the stupid default control system, which uses two different sets of keys for driving and moving. Particularly annoying is the fact that the mouse keys aren't even mapped and the 5 key on the numeric keypad is used to fire the gun. You can't change the controls when you're in the game, so you have to quit your mission and change everything from the main menu.

Even with our set of controls in place, nothing could make up for the incredibly poor way that movement is handled in the game. The main character looks stupid when he moves and jumps like a ballerina, belying the tough undercover cop he's supposed to be.

The car physics are even worse and seem to be based on a bad 1980s cop show with squealing wheels and tyre marks. It's so bad that you spin out of control at a few miles an hour. You get slightly better control by ditching the keyboard and using an analogue joystick as it's a little better for driving, but it's completely unusable for running around.

If this isn't bad enough, the car chases are dull affairs, where the lead car is programmed to stay a set distance ahead of you. The AI is also appalling, to the point where cars chasing you will repeatedly ram into the barrier you're hiding behind. Don't worry if you have to engage anyone on foot, as it's rare that they actually move. It's equally rare for you to shoot them, though, as aiming weapons is really hard.

Driv3r looks and feels like a demo for a game that's due out in a couple of years, not a finished product. Avoid it at all costs.

David Ludlow

✓ Atmospheric cut scenes

✗ Gameplay, control system, graphics, physics and artificial intelligence

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 256MB RAM, 5.5GB disk space. **Product code** B00010FP5U



Exciting dramas about buses are few and far between, even if you are Keanu Reeves, but Driv3r is a letdown

REVIEW REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME

ATARI
Act of War: Direct Action

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.cd-wow.co.ukDETAILS www.atari.com/actofwar

Atari's Act of War: Direct Action is set in the near future where oil prices have risen to \$7 (around £3.75) per gallon. Rather than lump it, like us British whose petrol is currently more expensive, the world is thrown into turmoil.

While the plot may seem implausible, the execution is top-notch. Live action cut scenes build up the tense plot and elaborately planned and filmed action scenes make up for the poor acting. The game involves three factions: the US Army, Task Force Talon and the evil Consortium. The single-player missions, however, only let you play as the good guys; you need the multiplayer or skirmish modes to try all the factions.

Act of War doesn't do anything different to existing games of the same genre, but it does its job well. The graphics, which are based on satellite images of towns such as London, are particularly lush. It uses a 3D engine, so you can zoom and swoop around the action.

The range of weapons available is impressive, and the relative strengths and weaknesses of individual units mean you have to plan attacks carefully. You can send troops into buildings to protect them, provide covering fire from windows and set up ambushes. Use the right combination of troops and tactics, and you're more efficient at dispatching the enemy.

The single-player mode consists of around 12 missions and can be completed quickly, and the plot runs out of steam towards the end. However, the multiplayer options will keep you occupied for longer. To build up your army you need money, which you get in a variety of ways, from building oil refineries to taking prisoners.

This has all been done before, but Act of War does it with such panache and style that it's still great fun to play. A longer single-player campaign would have been preferable, though.

David Ludlow

✓ Slick and smooth approach to an old genre

✗ Short single-player campaign

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 6GB disk space, DVD drive. **Product code** B0006SK5TM



War, what is it good for? Atari attempts to answer the question with the help of some big explosions

REVIEW ROLE-PLAYING GAME

UBISOFT
The Bard's Tale

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £17 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS www.thebardstale.com

On many levels, The Bard's Tale is an unsurprising action role-playing game. You play as the eponymous Bard, and to progress through the game you must wander around the medieval countryside looking like a 1980s Levis' model with a sword. On your travels, you slay monsters in the woods, cast vaguely pyrotechnic spells and perform tasks for other characters in the hope of gaining some kind of reward. The only unusual element is the manner in which you cast spells by playing your lute.

What makes The Bard's Tale different is its script. Although it relies on the usual elements of any fantasy game, it manages to avoid the po-faced seriousness of its peers in favour of a storyline that's delivered with tongue superglued in cheek. In the manner of famous comedy games such as The Secret of Monkey Island, the script is packed full of jokes from the very start.

Unfortunately, the level of the humour is a little different. Where most successful humorous games rely on a hefty dose of surrealism, The Bard's Tale seems to take more cues from Jim Davidson than *Monty Python*. The first size-of-my-sword gag is delivered barely minutes into the game, and the dialogue continues on this level. Many other jokes revolve around banter between your character and the snide voice of the omniscient narrator. This kind of postmodernist humour can work well – think of the self-aware characters in *The Simpsons*, for example – but here it seems grating and forced.

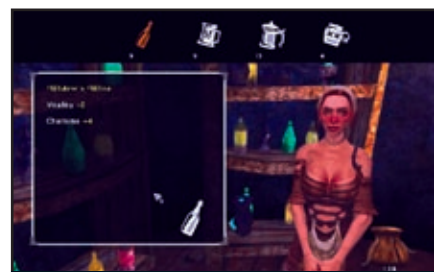
This is not to say that The Bard's Tale is a failure. The gameplay works well enough, and if you like your jokes packed with unsubtle innuendo and your swords magical, it should be right up your street. Unfortunately, fans of both serious role-playing and more original comedy are likely to be left cold.

Tom Royal

✓ Tongue-in-cheek approach sets it apart from other RPGs

✗ Bawdy humour just isn't that funny

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98/Me/2000/XP, 800MHz Pentium III processor, 256MB RAM, 1.6GB disk space, Radeon 7500 or GeForce 2 or above. **Product code** B000219M4



No bard's tale would be complete without the buxom wench, but what's with those peculiar red stains?